Writers in Progress

A Collection of Works by Basic Writing Students

1994-95

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Editorial staff:
Faith Benedetti, David Drescher, Eric Jones, Diane Gori

Layout/Design:
Faith Benedetti

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INTRODUCTION

Most of us use words and language much as we use our limbs and bodies: unconsciously and with uncanny ease and grace. We no more fret over word choice and sentence structure when speaking with a friend, than we do calculate velocity, distance, and angles when running down a fly-ball. In a very real sense language, like walking or smiling, comes to us naturally, a miraculous gift for pleasure.

Why, then, should so many people find writing -- a sort of one-sided conversation on paper -- such a difficult and frustrating process? If a command of language is natural, why should writing entail so much work? No doubt, a major source of a student writer's unease is the grader's red pen; as authors we are held accountable for the correctness (proper syntax, grammar, and punctuation) of what we say. More daunting is the fact that each of us as writers faces the confines of a blank page alone. Like draught horses, our words must now pull the weight of theme and carry coherence like a plow through the pages of our essay. From the confusion of our worlds, we are instructed to weave sense and clarity into meaning. And there are doubts. When we must put our words and thoughts on display for others, it is easy to question the importance or relevance of what we know and feel. Language then seems more like a silent drowning than it does running or walking.

The student works gathered here represent multiple and varied triumphs over silence and doubt. Some of the finest essays written during the 1994-1995 academic year in EN4400, the college's Basic Writing program, these pieces, and the numerous drafts that gave birth to them, are testament to the fresh, intelligent, and original voice that emerges naturally through the hard work of writing. Of the sun-bleached country bar by the side of a Southern backroad; of a parent's pain as a child steps off to her first day of school, the pain of a first letting go; of the chilling cruelties of school girls in their venomous attacks of prejudice, these authors speak. They have gathered up for us in words a piece of who they are, told us where they are from or where they might be going, and we as readers are enriched.

With each an original voice, with graceful language and clear thinking, these writers have made it look easy. And that, we all know, is no easy task.

Eric Jones
The Writing Center

My Uncle's House

by Maribel Monge

Every Sunday after I went to church I had to go to my Uncle Nestor's house. Since my uncle was a single man, my sisters and I took care of the cleaning of the house, his clothes -- everything.

As any solitary man would be, you can imagine how his house was. But believe me, no matter how far your imagination can go, my uncle's house was far worse. It was a complete mess and I hated it.

My uncle's house was located in Rio Grande, Puerto Rico in a small neighborhood called La Dolores. It was in a field so small that the house took a third of the land. It was composed of two bedrooms, the kitchen, living room and the bathroom, which was so small that with just one step out of the bathtub you could close or open the bathroom door. The house also had a porch and a canopy, which in my opinion was almost as big as the rest of the house.

As soon as I opened the gate, the first thing that I could see was the waste of the horses, dog and chickens everywhere. Also there were two big mango trees (one close to the other) in the left corner of the fence. There were a lot of rotten mangoes on the ground. Some were good, but most of them were spoiled. In spite of the strong smell of the mangoes, the stench of the horses' waste dominated.

Moving forward, I would find the canopy. There was also an old, beige, 1970 Chevrolet Nova which my uncle was always fixing but never finished. I had to walk very carefully through the canopy always looking down to the floor afraid of being hurt by the nails, pieces of wood, hammer, screwdrivers, nuts and the empty tool box where all of these tools were supposed to be. Walking carefully, I arrived at the kitchen door. There was a front door for the porch, but since my uncle had this door closed most of the time, I always, unconsciously, walked directly to the kitchen door. Without putting the first step inside of the kitchen, since the door was open, I began to see my Calvary. The dinner table was covered with dirty laundry, a bunch of shirts and pants. Those clothes, especially the shirts, were impregnated with the sweat of that week of work. Although it was the larger amount of clothes that we had to wash for my uncle, those clothes gave us less dread than the five or seven pairs jeans and T-shirts that were under the dinner table. Those were the clothes that my uncle used to work with his horses, cleaning their stables, washing them and looking for grass. Those clothes had such a stench that the odor flooded the kitchen and my nose. They usually were so filthy that the jeans were hard and stiff as a pole.

Right away, already inside of the kitchen, I could see the stove which had a dirty pot, not only on top of each burner, but also on top of the stove. Without touching them I could tell they were covered with grease and the "goo" of mango. My uncle also kept the horses' food in two big cans in the kitchen.

Next to the kitchen was one of the bedrooms. This was more than a bedroom. It was like a big closet where all the horses' stuff was. There were three saddles, four hats hanging on the walls, bridles on the floor, two horsewhips

hanging on the inside part of the bedroom door and bags of food for the horses, chickens and dog. Also there was a big wood box where my uncle had all the stuff he needed to make the horseshoes. This box was almost in the middle of the room.

The living room was a perfect place for antiques. Any radio or television that my uncle saw in the trash he took it and put it in the living room. There he had three radios, one sofa and a coffee table which was always covered with papers, such as receipts of animal foods and invitations to parties.

Since my uncle spent most of the time outside, in the kitchen or in the bedroom next to the kitchen, the other areas, the living room , the other bedroom and the porch were almost clean.

Coming back out through the kitchen door was the backyard. In the middle of it was the cart with the shovel, rake and hose inside. Behind was a chain of stables where the horses were. They were always neighing, eager to be let out of their cages. There were also all the chickens and roosters together in the backyard, eating the corn that my uncle threw to the ground. The dog would be drinking water in a little pit next to the kitchen.

Almost four months ago, my uncle died and this house that displeased me so much is today an abandoned house, empty, isolated and sad. Today I wish to revive just one moment of all that which I hated. I'm sure that then I would appreciate all that were in those moments spent there.

Ricko's

by Deborah Barrett

As I leave for my daily "coca-cola" run, I know today, being so hot, that the few hundred yards will feel like two miles. "The walk will do me good," I think to myself. As I start down the dirt road it is 3:30, a sweltering 107 degrees and humid. Just breathing made me sweat. The road sprinklers are on, but the dust still flies. The water seems to evaporate before it hits the ground. It is so peaceful I can hear the tree frogs, their echoing hum getting louder then suddenly stopping.

I give a glance up towards Ricko's, the local bar. The building is constructed of cypress wood. The planks are unstained, looking dry and worn. It's not much of a place. The wear and tear are the most evident on the old tattered porch and stairs. There are two bench stools and a chair on the porch. I can imagine a farmer sitting there, enjoying the shade and peace away from the fields.

The distant buzz of a bass boat brings my attention to the lake a little farther past where Ricko's stands. The lake is very low this time of year, so low you could probably walk right across. The water is as glassy as a mirror. The reflection of the sun is blinding. A soft breeze blows the odor of the shore past me, smelling something like boat oil and dead fish. I'm glad it's not windy. Just offshore there are pontoons tied off in a group, most of them not being used for years. They remind me of a junkyard.

My attention falls back to Ricko's as I hear the jukebox play "Killing Time" by Clint Black. I can see that it's dark inside by the small windows at the left side of the porch. Either that or the dirt buildup on the windows is keeping light from showing through.

The sign above the porch reads Ricko's, the paint faded by the sun. What must have been a deep rich blue is now pale and faded. The sign is five feet tall, ten feet long and much too large for the place. As I get closer, the smell from the barrels next to the porch hits me. It's the smell of a week's worth of trash and hot sour beer. It is enough to make one sick. I see the flies buzzing around the trash looking for their meal. As I reach the steps, I hold my breath until I get inside.

Climbing the four steps, I notice how uneven and springy they are, as if they were about to fall in. As my hand goes for the screen door I hear Patsy Cline's "I Fall to Pieces" begin. Pulling the screen door open, it is evident that in the thirty or so years it hasn't been oiled. The loud screech goes through my head like a steel pin. The old wooden door behind the screen is not much better in quality. The pine-hole knots and large cracks in between the boards remind me of an old log cabin. But for a large bulky door, it swings open with ease.

A musty odor lingers on the cool air. The single light coming from the TV over the bar helps my eyes adjust to the inside. I look around to see no one sitting at any of the three tables placed at three corners of the room. The bar takes up the fourth corner. There are chairs just scattered around the tables.

I look to my left to see a stranger in a red tank top and blue jeans, sitting at the poker machine. It is an adult video game, but a lot more expensive. To my right

the shuffle board table is quiet. It looks like a miniature bowling lane. I do my usual look around the walls to see if any attempt has been made to clean any of the cobwebs down. They are ancient, as are the animals that are hanging on the wall. Deer, squirrel, fox -- you name it, and it is up there.

But the largest is the buffalo head on the wall straight across from the front door. The dark brown hair is all matted and dirty. The animals nostrils are flared, but his eyes are dull, empty of life. As I look at him, I think to myself, "Don't look at me that way. I didn't hang you there."

Sounds from the poker machine bring me back into reality. "Wubba wubba wubba" reminds me of the sound Pacman used to make. Passing between the two tables, I move to the bar. Patsy's on her last chorus as I sit down. The collection of bar stools are unusual, varying from an old flat stool to an orange vinyl stool with a back. Of course I take the orange one, with what little padding it has left.

From behind I hear Cash, the owner, yell from the stockroom, "I'll be right there." I tell him to take his time and I know he will. I glance under Mr. Buffalo to the collage of old pictures on the wall. It always looks like they are spreading, but I can never find a new one. Turning around, looking through the window in the wall, I can see Cash stacking cases of beer on the pool table. Actually the wall is only half way up with a beam to complete the doorway to the poolroom. There is a faint rattle from the air conditioner. The poolroom is empty. Souvenirs of its last occupants are still on the tables. The light from the security door, which hasn't been open since I was born, shows the dampness and the slight rotting of the wood. I turn back around and look over to the dance room. The jukebox goes quiet. Now the hum of the beer coolers and ice machine can be heard. Cash returns from the stockroom. Cash is a small man, thin-framed with gray hair and glasses. The wrinkles from his past alcoholism show in his face. In his usual grumpy way he asks what I want. A Coke, I tell him. As he sets the can and goes to the stocking coolers, I look the bar over. The bar is a relic. The surface is rough with cuts and cracks from the past occupants. It's color is an unusual dark brown. Some people write their names on the bathroom walls. Here they carve them into the bar. Names are everywhere you look, fitting into the smallest spots, some crossing over others. There are not many I know and no new ones I recognize.

I hear the door shut. I look around to see the stranger had left. I look up over the kitchen door in front of me. There are deer antlers with Christmas lights wrapped around them. I think it's O.K. to take them down since it is July. But like the webs, they'll never come down.

Realizing that work is only a few short hours away, I decide that it's time to go. I tell Cash to put it on my tab as I think of my night to come. When I open the door the brightness blinds me for a short second. As I come out of the air conditioning, the heat is almost paralyzing. As I go down the stairs, I hear Stevie Ray Vaughn kicking out a tune. I think, "Play it Stevie."

Some people would wonder why this place would have meaning to me. All I can say is that Ricko's, the lake, the South in general has such a peaceful and soothing way about it like no other place I've ever been. It takes you away from the

worries of life. It lets you be yourself or someone else if you like and casts no judgement. There are very few places that I can say that about. And to this day every time I think about Ricko's I can still feel the peace and tranquility I felt back then.

My Swing
by Suzanne Morin

My village was St. Marc of Long Lake in Quebec, Canada. It is situated in a stretch of low land surrounded with mountains and a long lake flowing through it. Our house and the outbuildings were situated near that lake. I was very fortunate to be surrounded by such beauty but my favorite place was the barn. One side of the building was for livestock and the other for harvested hay and in the middle hung my swing. It was the place I longed for at the end of each school day.

Walking alone on a sultry afternoon, under a very deep blue sky, I enjoyed coming back home from school where I felt safe in my habitual surroundings. A hint of wind kept the lake partly calm. Only a few waves could be seen here and there. The mountains encircling the lake were covered with big trees and verdant vegetation. It was oppressively hot and I walked heavily on my unpaved rocky road. Pushing pebbles with my feet, I was thinking and anticipating the moments I would be able to play on my swing, cherishing the thoughts like a lush sumptuous fruit.

I will never forget the rarity of my toys, and I always will remember vividly how much I loved my swing. At home, I would put on my tattered clothes and do my daily chores as fast as I could. It was only then that I was able to gladly escape into the barn to play the gay and cheerful games made by my own imagination. I fantasized flying as a bird, fluttering my wings like a spread-eagle looking over my valley.

Entering the barn my eyes had to become accustomed to the dimness of the place between the hay-rick and the mezzanine. To reach the swing, I had to stand on a stack of empty containers and old pieces of wood. Only then was I able to hang the prickly rope. My tiny hands tightly enclosed the cord. I had to sit on a hard wooden board, lined with rough bark which imprinted itself on my skin. Widely smiling, feeling reckless, I wholeheartedly used all my power to pull myself with force to sway backward and forward with enough strength as to raise myself higher and higher with every motion. My body built up a sweat that felt cool on my skin from the snake-like movements I was making. My hair disheveled itself from the twisting and turning and the swift wind I could feel on each side of my head.

I invented silly games. Sometimes I counted the repetitions; at others I would turn myself in the same direction as to twirl the cables together. By giving it a jerky thrust I would unwind as fast as I could in order to twist all the way again on the opposite direction, doing it over and over until it came to a halt by itself. I would aim to reach the rustic pine board, over the arch of the wide barn door. I was trying to stretch myself to reach it with my toes. There was one particular plank to catch the flicker of light that passed through the board, suddenly subsiding with each descent.

In a half-crouched position with each haulage, I had to breathe deeper and deeper every time. I could smell the scent of animals and hay similarly blending together like a peasant should smell. I swung myself for long period of time. I often became

dizzy and nauseated, but hardly anything caused me to come back to reality. Only the sound of my mother's voice calling me back home could jolt me out of my daydreams and of my world of make believe.

I felt fearless in my haven, even though my backward motion gave me the sensation of falling into an abyss, like the bottomless lake. The swift motion of my swing brought me great enjoyment. I was blessed with a great family and a gratifying childhood.

My Mother and Friend

by Kelly Flannery

When I was a young child, around the age of ten, I can always remember wanting to be like my mother. I could sit for hours and watch what she was doing, like when she was making chocolate chip cookies I would stick my hands in the dough and mush it all around. One other thing I can remember doing is putting my mother's shoes on that were ten times too big and walking around the house like a big shot. This is how I would try and be like her.

Everyone loves my mother because she is the kindest, most caring person to be around. My mother is not the tallest person or the skinniest, but to me she is the best person I know. Her hair is a dark auburn color. It is straight in the back and curly on top. Her eyes are as brown as the leaves after they fall off the tree in the middle of autumn.

It was June of 1990. I was fifteen years old and it was the last day of eighth grade. The sun was high above in the sky, with very light, fluffy clouds. I was thrilled to pieces that I was finally going to high school. My mom was so happy for me. She looked at the clock and realized it was time for me to get dressed for graduation. My mother had a look upon her face that made me so happy. She had a smile from ear to ear.

So off we went to graduation. As I walked in, all the graduates' families were standing and clapping, but the first person I saw was my mom. As the ceremony went on, my mom did not take her eyes off of me until the end when I received my diploma.

Now my mother told me,"You have to work even harder so you are able to go to college." She told me she wanted the best for me and that she did not want me to have to go through what she was going through.

My mother has had a hard life and come a long, long way. She had an abusive husband, which was my father, but now she finally got away. It was a hard and long process, but the day came when a gun was put to her head. This was when she changed her life all around and became stronger by standing up for herself and getting a divorce. This is why she is the way she is now, because she became a stronger person through this ordeal.

Each day was always a new experience. She always did things on the spur of the moment. One Saturday I got up about 7 AM. My mother was already dressed and ready to go. She said,"Come on. Let's go. Jump in the shower. We need to get out of here. All the good yard sales have already started." I jumped in the shower, threw on some clothes and off we went.

You see, yard sales are my mother's favorite thing. My mom is a good driver until she sees a yard sale sign and she can spot them from a mile away. All of a sudden she thinks she is in the Indy 500. She takes corners at warp speed. One time she even made my head hit the door. We both laughed. After that we would spend the day together talking and laughing, saying,"Look what I got. If they only knew

what they had."

At around noontime we would go to lunch (not a fancy place) and just grab a burger. After the burger we went looking for more yard sales until four. Then we went home to drop off the stuff, or as my mother would say, "our treasures."

The things I do with her don't have to use a lot of money. It is the time we spend together that counts.

As the years have passed, we have spent a lot of time together doing many things. One thing we have done is taking long drives and getting lost. Why, I don't know, but she does it and it is really kind of fun, because you can find new locations and new areas. Like for example, Parker's Maple house in Mason, New Hampshire. This is a place out in the woods where you can eat and visit the gift shop. This is another one of my mother's favorite places. She found this place one time on one of her many drives.

As the years have gone by my mother has always been there for me. Like when a boyfriend broke up with me, she would say,"You are a special person and you will have heartaches, but one day you will find the right person for you." I hope she will always be there. This year it was time for me to graduate from high school. I had many mixed emotions about leaving. Who do you think was there to help me along, my friend and mother, of course.

One big thing that came up was awards night, so I asked my family to go and they did. This night we did not know what awards I was receiving, but we knew I was getting something. Just to know that I was getting one award was special to my mother. As she sat there, I had to sit in front of everyone, because I was on the National Honor Society. After the ceremony, I was able to sit with my mom. She told me she was so very proud of me and that she loved me very, very much. Eight other times that night they called my name for different awards like science, gym, etc... and each time, her eyes filled with joy and her heart filled with love. She walked out of the school with her head held high, telling everyone I was her daughter.

A couple of weeks later I graduated from high school. To me graduation was a happy, but sad moment. At the same time I loved high school, I also wanted to move on. My mother was ecstatic, as tears came down her eyes. She realized at that point I had grown up and become a young adult.

Now that I have grown up, I still in some ways want to be like her, because she is so wonderful. But also, I want to be myself.

"Mom, you have helped me through life and always been there for me. Now it is time for me to help you. Thank you and I love you very much."

Mom
by Michael Tourville

When you enter the house she's soon in the hall to greet you with open arms and a kiss on the cheek. At no point during my upbringing have I been embarrassed about kissing my mother in public. You might say I was proud to show my friends the great relationship we had.

My mother is five feet tall and weighs about one hundred ten pounds. Her age of seventy four years is undetectable. She walks at a speed which I never have, and probably never will be able to keep up with. Her diet consists of vegetables, fish, vegetables, stew with a minimum of five vegetables, chicken, vegetables, and small portions of red meat with lots of vegetables. It's not that she is a vegetarian, but rather she believes that they are healthy. She has always colored the gray out of her hair. And although conservative, her clothes are flattering to her slender shape. My mother will have a couple of social drinks, but has never been inebriated that I can remember and does not smoke. She enjoys playing games such as Rummy and Chinese Checkers when I was younger, and now Fortyfives and Bridge, that I'm older.

When my eldest sister got married, it was my mother who made her gown and those of the seven bridesmaids in her wedding party. As a child, I played rough but never went to school with a hole in my clothes.

Until I got married, there was always a bag lunch in the refrigerator before going to work. On unplanned occasions like overtime, one would be ready before finishing breakfast.

It's been said that due to her French heritage, my mother makes the best meat pies. My wife has tried, but just cannot seem to create the same wonderful texture.

While growing up, the one person that was always there is my mother. If I had a question, she would answer as best she could. Often times I would ask why so and so was so mean to me. I can understand how much it must have hurt her and her reply would be "Maybe they are having a bad day" or "Maybe you misunderstood their actions." She suggested that, all the same, I should talk to them alone, and let them know how I felt.

I remember around Christmas at four years old, my older brothers told me there was no such thing as Santa Claus. I was upset, and approaching my mother, she said that because someone believes in him does not mean they are stupid. She told me that the real reason for Christmas is to celebrate the birth of Christ, and to believe that the sharing of gifts no matter who they come from is a show of the goodness and love of God.

My mother is a religious woman, and when we were young we had to go to church and Sunday school. In our teens, we were allowed to make up our own minds. Of course, she might show her disapproval but in a guiding manner, rather than a forceful one. Although she never said it, I feel she believed if someone was forced they would be more apt to rebel than to concede.

As a teenager, most children are rebellious, but the few times my mother and I disagreed, she would listen to my point of view, and then with few words said, she could lead me to closely consider my actions. I can honestly say she allowed me just enough freedom during those times not to lose sight of the special family I belong to.

My mother has nine children, and none of us can say which is her favorite. She applauds all our achievements equally, then doesn't boast enough to embarrass. As large as my family is, no one lives more than a half hour's drive from my mother, testament in my opinion that she is the hub of the family wheel.

I kid with my wife that my mother will outlive me. Although I don't like to think about, the reality is some day she won't be here. My wife says I'll be a basket case. When that day comes, I will surely feel sorrow for my own loss. But I can take comfort in knowing, if there is a better place, that is where my Mother will be.

Life With Grandma

by Gail Sauvan

Louise Mary Mooney was born October 1st somewhere in the 1800s. Tenney Street in Georgetown, Massachusetts is where she lived most of her early years, bringing up her nine children, seven of whom were boys. She was a red-haired beauty with freckles covering the majority of her upper body. Later, as she got older, her hair was white as snow, unless she had a perm -- then it turned purple. A hair net would gather up her thinning hair. She also had chin hairs that she had to shave once in a while.

She was 5 ft., 10 in. tall, but osteoporosis made her shorter. Arthritic legs almost confined her to a wheelchair, but that didn't stop her. She was very determined to walk before long. Being overweight was her downfall. She tried all kinds of diets, but her willpower wasn't strong enough. She would sneak food into a Kleenex and bring it into the bathroom to eat it. When confronted, she would simply say "I'm not eating anything." Then you would see her chin quivering like she was ready to cry.

When I was a baby, Grandpa had a heart attack, leaving Grandma all alone, so she came to live with us. She had children all over the place, like Tennessee, New Jersey and New York, and she often flew to visit them. They all loved to see her because she would help them with their problems, with advice and sometimes money. At Christmas time, she would make sure all of her relatives had presents from Santa. She didn't want to live out of state, because she wanted to be near her husband. He was buried in Georgetown.

Her voice was sometimes raspy, but when she hollered, she meant business. She always tried to boss my sister and me around by saying "Put your hat and rubbers on or you'll catch a cold." Her favorite saying was "There's always a first time ...." It's funny but I tend to say that now and again. She also used to ask us where we were going if we went out anywhere and what time we would be coming home.

She used to watch soaps, but her favorite show was Lawrence Welk. She was also fond of talk host Mike Douglas. Some soaps she took to heart. If one of the characters got raped, she would get upset and say "Mark my words. That could have been you." Her least favorite program was "The Three Stooges," but we would watch it when she wasn't there.

Sometimes I would sit on her lap and tell her my problems. She would listen quietly and give advice with love and understanding. People always came to her for advice because of her maturity and comfort.

Her hobbies were knitting, like 14 pairs of mittens for all the grandchildren. She could also sew anything, even shoes. Crocheting was the favorite thing for me to watch her do. She made quilts. I still have a colorful one which I cherish. The other thing she made me was a beautiful, mostly blue coat. I wish I kept it. Later, when her eyes were deteriorating and even glasses were no help, she was still

determined to keep on doing her hobby.

My grandma wore dresses below the knee and a corset instead of a girdle. That would hold up her nylon stockings. On her feet she wore old-fashioned, short-heeled white shoes. I used to wash them for her, and my mom would cut her eagle-tough toenails.

She was often lonely. Even though I tried to fix her up with a couple of men, she would say "I'm waiting for my husband." I guess she really loved him.

In her room, as I helped clean, she fondly spoke about the old days and how she loved being a mother of nine children. My mom was born in a taxi on the way to the hospital.

I often looked at all her jewelry. I hoped someday some of it would be mine. When she died, I got some along with one of the wooden musical boxes -- mine played "Tea For Two." I used to listen to it for hours. I no longer have it or the jewelry because I moved a lot through the years.

We called her the "Good Fairy" because she did the dishes for us if we weren't around. She also mended clothes and shoes. She also stopped us from getting punished too much. One time we were bad going to bed , so the next night we were to get a spanking before we retired for the night. Mom and Dad went for a walk, and while they were away Grandma said, "You should go to bed before your parents get home so you won't get punished." When they returned, we were already asleep.

Grandma and I spent a great deal of time in the kitchen. Cooking the desserts for Thanksgiving and Christmas, we would bake pies and cinnamon rolls. Mmm! You should have smelled the house. It was like a bakery. She was famous for her bread pudding. When it was cooling, my mom ate the crusty top. Once when we weren't there Grandma tried to cook hamburger and onions and almost burned the house down. The fire department came to the house. We knew then she needed supervision.

I'll never forget all the times she bought us clothes at J.M. Fields. She helped pick out our clothes for the school year. I think she bought Christmas presents there also.

My grandma was never really sick a day in her life, until her last weeks on earth. One night she became very ill. The ambulance took her to the hospital. The doctor diagnosed her as having an inner ear infection. She had to have constant care so they wanted her in nursing home. She never made it there though because she died in her sleep one Sunday morning. We got to say good-bye. Mom and Vicky, my sister, tried to wake her, but it was no use. She was nothing but an empty shell.

Her funeral was upsetting to all the family and friends who attended. I picked out her dress, one with a light blue floral print. She looked beautiful. I also picked out the 23rd Psalm for the director to read. When it was time for our final good-byes, I fell apart and tried to pull her body out of the casket because I didn't want her to be gone.

Things didn't seem the same after that. I thought I saw her in every room. Once I even made tea the way she liked it, but when I took it in to the room, her big

brown recliner was empty. I ached to be near her so much that a day didn't go by I didn't shed a few tears. I think she was like a peace maker because shortly after her death, my parents split up and eventually got a divorce. I was very distraught over it. I always thought they would grow old together.

Fourteen years have gone by. I have had a baby boy. When I was carrying him, Grandma's spirit came to visit one night, giving her approval I guess. Dana was born on her birthday, which makes it easier to remember her. I've been in therapy for depression but I'm better now. I think of her sometimes. I hear her voice and it reminds me that I'll see her again some day.

My Parents' Anniversary

by Jaime Alvarez

On October 22, 1993, I was awakened to the sound of my alarm clock. I looked out the window and noticed the sun hadn't risen yet. The need to wake up early was to prepare myself for my responsibilities on the special occasion that was about to take place. Shortly after I woke up, one by one, the people in the house started waking up: aunt, uncle, grandparent, brother and cousins. The house became chaotic, and tensions flared. With my grandmother yelling because she had nothing to wear and my uncle still in pajamas directing orders like a drill sergeant, my momentum of getting ready increased immensely. Everyone was anxious about their responsibilities that they had to perform. We all had the sensational feeling that my parents' 25th anniversary was going to be a very special occasion indeed.

There were countless things needed to be prepared for the party. We all separated the duties amongst ourselves. That way we all shared equally. There wasn't time to prepare beforehand because the surprise party was spur of the moment. I thought it would be a nice touch to finalize my parents' vacation.

Even though the responsibilities were divided equally, I took pride in the obligations I was in charge of. Chance made my day tougher than what I expected.

My first destination was to drive to Chatila's Bakery in Salem, New Hampshire where I needed to get a beautiful, well-made anniversary cake. When I walked in the store, I was amazed at how similar the cake looked to the one in the wedding pictures I saw of my parents.

The layers seemed to stack higher, as I came closer. The temptation overwhelmed me as I held back my finger from dipping into the creamy white frosting shimmering on top. The silver Spanish trimmings around each layer enhanced the beauty of the cake. Who can't resist another piece of cake, as you sink your fork into the orange-lemon filling, sprinkled with shreds of coconut? Breaking my concentration, the baker jokingly said, "What can I say, I'm too good."

I gently cradled the cake in one arm and tried to open the car door with the other hand. My hand slipped as I lifted up the handle, which caused me to lose balance. As I saw the cake landing in slow motion, my left hand covered my eyes as the rest of my body leaned against the car in case I collapsed. Then I stared towards the sky screaming,"Why me?!"

As the cake landed on the ground, coincidentally, the columns remained upright keeping the top layers of the cake intact. I carefully wedged my fingers under the cake hoping it was sturdy enough to bring inside. As I staggered into the bakery, my eyes began to water forming tears that were unexpected. The lady behind the counter ran to my side, helping me balance the cake on the counter. She patted my back to calm my hysteria. She calmly said,"There is nothing to be worried about. It can be repaired to look like new again." As she spoke those words, I became hopeful again that the day wasn't a total loss.

As I sat there waiting, my watch became another extension of my arm. She finally came out saying,"You are fortunate that I only had to replace one layer and the leftover frosting was enough to patch up the rest of the cake." I was too scared to carry the cake, so they offered to put it in my car.

As I reached my house, I honked the horn, implying that I needed help with the cake. My uncle and brother came out and carried the cake inside. Trying to avoid an explanation why I was late, quietly I went inside my car and drove to Logan Airport.

I was going about 95 miles an hour on the highway, making good time. I was so concerned about picking up my parents on time that I never noticed the blue lights flashing behind me. Two minutes later, I took a quick glimpse at the rearview mirror. In shock, I gradually pulled over to the breakdown lane. As my head flopped on the steering wheel, I actually started to cry.

I could hear the officer's black boots tapping on the tar as he walked towards my car. Holding his notepad in his hand, he bent down, looked at me and asked, "Son why are you crying?"

As he took off his sunglasses, I explained how my day had become a disaster. As I looked in his eyes, sympathy formed and the flush on his cheeks made it obvious that my explanation had hit home. Showing leniency, he actually let me go with a warning. I said to him, "If you had a ring, sir, I would gladly kiss it." Constantly thanking him, I focused on finishing my mission.

I finally reached the airport, hoping my parents' plane was delayed. I ran to the terminal, anxiously looking for them. A sigh of relief came over me when the intercom announced that the plane they were on would be landing in 5 minutes.

Wiping the sweat off my forehead, I started laughing hysterically at the adventurous day that had taken place. I finally spotted them in the crowd, as they proudly showed off their dark tans and brightly colored Hawaiian shirts. Something miraculous overwhelmed me as I saw them holding hands and giggling, as if they were newlyweds. I observed that after 25 years their love never changed; it just got stronger every year.

As I was driving home, it occurred to me that no matter how disastrous the day had been, their love for me wouldn't have changed. Just seeing their bewildered faces light up as they walked inside the house is all it took for me to make this special occasion a day I will never forget. I never was aware how much I cherished them in my heart until that glorious day.

My Father

by Victoria Price Dubus

On July 11, 1991, my house was pretty busy. My mom was cleaning the house. Candice, my little sister, was playing. My dad was running around looking for his sweat pants, asking all of us if we took them. He then went to his 5 o'clock softball game. My older sister Kim and I were getting dressed and beautifying ourselves for this big party we were invited to. My oldest sister Sheri and her boyfriend Andy were at his house in Weston.

Kim and I were going out the door when the phone rang. We all raced to the phone, but my mom answered it. My mom said, "Hello." I don't know what the person on the phone said, but I could somewhat sense it wasn't good. My mom's face scared me. She was trying to hold back tears. Kim and I kept asking, "Who is it Mom?" My mom hung up the phone quickly and nervously said, "Your father is at the hospital. Come on. Let's go." We all literally ran out the door and got into Kim's little Dodge Omni.

Kim drove us to Anna Jacques Hospital in Newburyport, MA. The ride there was awful. My mom was crying and my little sister was crying. I was staring out the window as I told Candice, "It's nothing; everything will be O.K." I was really fighting back my own tears and was scared. I knew it wasn't going to be O.K.

I don't remember arriving at the hospital or entering it. A doctor greeted us and brought us down an empty hall. He told us that my father had suffered a major heart attack and that they were working on him now. My mother was yelling, "No, No, this can't be happening!" My mom's friend's husband, David Boyd, who is an EMT, joined us in the hall. I heard him telling her, "Come on Betty. Be strong for your children." Hearing this broke my heart. What was happening to my dad? I didn't hear the rest of the conversation. I chose not to.

We then were sent down the hall into a private room. My sister Sheri and her boyfriend met us there. The hospital sent a nurse into our room to keep us company. I hated her. She was nosy and laughed a lot. I could hear music. It was Brian Adams singing "Anything I Do." It made me sad, and I started thinking of the lyrics.

"Anything I do, I do it for you. I'd lie for you, I'd even die for you." I came to the decision that I was willing to die for my dad.

Soon the same doctor that we talked to before came into the room. He said the typical, "We did all that we could do. I'm sorry." We were all crying and wanted to see my father. Slowly, we started walking down the hall. I walked alone, a little behind. My sister Sheri, whom I never got along with, grabbed my arm and yelled with hatred in her voice, "Stick with the family." I hated her. I wanted to kill her. Even in a moment like that she remained cruel. We still haven't settled our differences until this day.

We were now in the emrgency room area. The doctor said he would get my

dad ready for us to see. My mother couldn't wait so she rushed into the room where my dad was, pushing through swinging doors. I caught a glimpse of my dad lying on a table with this clear pipe-like thing in his mouth. He didn't have his shirt on. I was so pissed to see him like that. A doctor followed my mom, and I saw my father a second time as the doors swung open again. My mother was crying hysterically, huggin my father. I was sitting on a hospital bed right across from the room where my dad was. That damn nurse was standing next to me. To avoid conversation with her, I looked straight ahead. This gorgeous EMT walked by, and we made eye contact. He looked sincere.

It was time for my family to go. The hospital gave us my dad's belongings. When we got outside, it was dark. It seemed as though we had been ther forever. I don't know how I got home,
or what I did first. I felt all alone and wanted to be alone.

The days before the wake, everyone we knew brought us food. All the traffic in the house took my mind off my father. I actually caught myself laughing. Kim and I scoped out the refrigerator and checked out all the bizarre food. We found a spaghetti pie, a whole turkey, jello molds withj things floating in them, and some strange looking casserole.

The day of the wake was traumatic. I don't know how I got there. Walking into the funeral parlor was bad enough, but then I saw my dad. He looked so different. His face was a chalky, peachy color, instead of the shiny red and tan face I last saw him with. I had a hard time controlling myself. My aunt tried to give me a strange looking pill to calm me down, but I refused. I don't remember much of anything, just little scenes here and there.

My father was forty-nine when he died. Exactly a week before his death was the 4th of July. My family had a big cookout. My dad and the whole family played volleyball all day. My father never complained about any pains or discomfort. His death was a major shock to my family.

My father died while playing saftball at Georgetown High School's upper field. He had chest pains during the game and decided to rest a little. Then he decided to play again, and that's when he collapsed on the field. One of his teammates started CPR. Another team player ran for help. There weren't any pay phones and the scholl was locked, so the team player had to run to the nearest house.

I get so angry when I think of the day. Why doesn't the school have any pay phones outside? Why didn't someone tell my dad not to play? Why didn't my dad ask someone to take him to the hospital? Why did my dad push himself when he knew he wasn't feeling well? Why? Why? Why? These questions go through my head often.

As time went on, I got used to the fact that my dad wasn't coming home, but once in a while I'd forget. One day after a soccer game, I rushed home to tell my dad about all the goals I had made. I realized that he wasn't there and that nobody else cared if I got a goal or not. It hurt, and I deal with this often about different matters.

I know it is impossible, but every chance I get I wish for him to come back. I wish for this every time I see a shooting star, go over railroad tracks, twist my necklace around because the latch is in front, or break a wishbone. Also, I wish for his return whenever I see a clock say 10:10 a.m. or p.m. because ten is my favorite number.

Three years have passed since my father's death. I think of him every day. I cry secretly all the time. I want to elope with my fiance instead of getting married in a church because I want my father to give me away and no other. I ask myself, "When will this end?" I know the answer is never.

More Than I Bargained For

by Patricia Moffatt

In 1973, my husband and I decided to buy a 100 year old eight room colonial home located on Wyman Street in Lawrence, Mass. The house had so much character to it, like two stained glass window in the front hall, beautifully embossed tin ceilings, hard wood floors, and the original mantel, all hand-carved with such detail. Little did I realize then that I was going to get a lot more than a house.

A year or so had passed and a considerable amount of remodeling was being done to the house. I started to notice that strange things were beginning to happen to me. I remember one evening as I was cooking dinner the salt and pepper shakers were right beside me, but when I turned around to get the salt again, they were nowhhere to be found. I looked everywhere but could not find them. A week had passed and I went down to the cellar to do the laundry. Over the washing machine was the salt shaker, the one I had lost a week ago. There was no mistaking it because it looked like a miniature Coca-Cola bottle. When I picked it up, I noticed that there was rice in the salt shaker, which was very odd. At that time, I didn't even know that rice was put in salt shakers to absorb moisture and prevent clogging.

The stairs often squeaked and cracked, as if someone was either going up or down them, but there was never anyone there. It seemed like I was always closing the attic door. However, if I wanted to openthe attic door, I had a very hard time doing it. In fact, I had to pull with such force that I was always aefraid of pulling the door knob out. So why was the attic door open on other occasions?

I remember rushing home from work one day to close all the windows before it started to rain. I got all the windows closed downstairs, and then I ran up to the attic to remove the screens and close the windows. After the storm was over, I went back up to the attic so I could open the windows again. Yet, much to my surprise, I found all the windows open and the screens put back in. I stood there saying, "What the hell is going on here?" All of a sudden, I felt very uneasy about being in the attic, and I ran out of there as fast as I could.

Over the next few months, things got worse instead of better. One night I asked my sister, who lived next door, if she could baby-sit that night for me. She said, "No problem."

When I got home that evening, my sister was all upset. She told me that under no circumstances would she ever baby-sit in my house again. She informed that the house was creepy, and she had a feeling that there was someone else in the house with her. She said, "Pat, I can't believe you live in this house! Since I have been here tonight, I have heard the doors opening and closing upstairs, and when I checked, I found the attic door open and the light on. I turned out the light and shut the door, but the whole thing happened all over again. I kept on hearing the stairs squeaking. Pat I'm afraid to stay in this house, and I will never baby-sit again."

My sister never did baby-sit in my house again. I would have to go next door

to visit at her house or leave my son there to be baby-sat.

My worst nightmare came true one night, after we had been living there for about a year and a half. My husband decided to go out for the evening and my two year old son was upstairs sleeping. I was in the living room sitting on the couch, admiring how nice the room looked since it was remodeled. As I was looking at the wall, I noticed the reflection of the moving trees outside. All of a sudden, I was startled by the sound of the attic door closing. Then the stairs started to squeak, as if someone were coming down them. I looked up, and right in front of me was this white cloud. In the middle of the cloud stood a man, but not just any man: it was a ghost! He was dressed, I believe, like a pirate, or maybe some type of sailor. I remember the hat he had on was similar to the type George Washington wore. He had a beard and carried a thick, heavy sword. I tried to get up and run, but ther was no way I could move. I don't know if it was fright that held me there or some strange force, but what I do know is that there was no way I was getting up from that couch. As he stood in front of me I heard him say, "I'm not here to hurt you, so don't be afraid of me."

After this eerie vision faded away, I was able to move again, but my heart was racing a hundred miles an hour. I never saw the ghost again, but after that night I never had any fear of him either. All the fear I had just vanished. This ghost loved to play games. Perhaps it was his way of letting me know he was there. Sometimes, four or five days would go by and nothing would happen, and I would say out loud, "Where are you? I miss you." Then, sure enough, he'd let me know he was there. I felt this ghost was my friend. He never did anything to hurt me, but he sure did a lot to make me laugh.

About three years later we decided to sell the house. When the real estate broker came over the house I decided it was in my best interest not to mention the ghost. I really didn't think it would be a selling point. After the house was sold, I remember everything was packed and ready to go, but I couldn't leave until I went up to the attic to say good-bye to my friend. I had lived for five years with a ghost in my house, and I told him I really was going to miss him. Unfortunately, or maybe fortunately, there was no visible response.

When I left the house, I left behind the ghost, because I have never had any more visits from him. Before I bought that house, if anyone would have told me they believed in ghosts, I would have laughed at them and thought they were crazy. I feel differently now. I honestly believe I lived with a ghost in harmony and that he spoke to me on that one occasion. I still think of him often. He was company to me, and I miss him at times.

Many years have passed and often I thought about going back to the house just one more time to say hi to my friend the ghost. I still haven't gone back to the house, but some day I will return.

First Day
by Jose Alers

The year was 1986 and fall was just beginning. As a matter of fact, it was September 9th of that year. That day will be engraved in my mind forever. I can still remember how beautiful that day was. It was a bright sunny day with a chill in the air, letting you know that winter would soon be upon us. That particular day would be the most emotional day for me and my daughter. My daughter had just turned five years old the month before, which meant that she would be starting kindergarten on that day. As I stood with her in front of that huge building which would be her school, I looked at her and my mind drifted back to when she was a baby.

She was so tiny as I held her in my arms. Her hands and feet were so tiny and cute, and her skin, with its wrinkles and reddish tone, wasn't really pretty, but to me she was beautiful, and at that moment I was the proudest father. As I continued to look at her, I was engulfed in the joy and wonder of it all. I still could not believe that this precious baby was mine and most of all that I had a part in bringing this beautiful baby into the world.

From that moment on I could not believe how quickly she grew. It seemed like it wasn't that long ago that I held her in my arms. When she was already walking, I remember that moment and how excited I was. As the months turned to years, she went from a sweet angel to a sometimes mischievous little girl, like when she put one of her toys in the aquarium or when she would play with daddy's keys and daddy couldn't find them the next morning. Even when she was mischievous she would look at you with those big brown eyes and that cute innocent smile that made you forget what you were going to say to her.

I guess I could say that she was a very active little girl. She was so active that it seemed she was always in to something. Then again, when you are that young you are very curious. But there were also many times when we would sit and read books, or rather I would read to her. She loved to be read to. She also liked to look at the pictures in the books. We would also talk about school and what it was like, the little things she could understand.

We would talk about all the things that she would do in school, and of course she asked, "Will I get to color with my crayons?"

"Yes honey. You will get to color with your crayons, and do so many other things," I said.

She asked,"Like what other things, Daddy?"

" Well you'll learn to read, so you can read any book you want," I said.

"But Daddy, I want you to read to me!" she said.

"Honey I'm always going to read to you, but won't it be fun if you can read to me," I said.

Well, after that she was sold on school. We had to plan it out. She had to

have new crayons and lots of papers, plus we couldn't forget coloring books. These were essential if she was going to learn in school, and she was not going to school without them, she told me.

The day had arrived and we were standing in front of her school. It was a huge building and I could sense that she was really getting nervous. I tried getting her to relax by showing her all the other little children, but that didn't help since some of them were starting to cry. I myself was a little nervous because I wasn't sure how she would react to school or her teacher. Then her teacher came outside to greet all of us. She was a sweet old lady. She looked like a typical grandmother. Her gray hair was in a bun, and she had such a warm smile that you felt at ease. She was a little on the plump side. But most of all, she was so friendly. She came over to us after talking to some other parents. "Hi, my name is Mrs. Gabriel. What's your name?" she asked.

"Becky," said my daughter in a soft voice.

" Well, I'm glad to have you in my classroom, Becky," she said with a big smile.

As she continued to talk to my daughter and ask her questions, I could see that my daughter was starting to relax and feel more comfortable with the whole situation. I, on the other hand, was going through different emotions. It was difficult to think that someone else was going to have a big part in my daughter's life. I came to the realization that this was just the beginning of her independence. Even though we would always have our bond as father and daughter, and I would still have a big influence in her life, she was on her way to building bonds with other people and I would have to learn to share her with them.

It was a very difficult moment for me to let my daughter go. And as she went in to the school with her teacher, I was left standing there alone and sad with watery eyes, trying to deal with these new emotions. However, at the same time, I was glad that this was the person who would be my daughter's teacher, because she also made me feel at ease, and with the feeling that I could trust her with my baby, who meant more to me than anything in the world.

Trash
by Bob Buck

One job that I used to have was as a city worker. I worked for the city of Lawrence.

I actually worked in two different departments while I was employed by the city. One of the departments that I worked in was the Parks Department. We would rake leaves, mow lawns, and get the ball fields ready for games. This was probably the easiest job that I have ever had.

I remember one day me and about six other people were told to go to the Lawrence Common and clean it up. We went there and began to rake the leaves and pick up all of the trash that was on the ground. About two hours later it began to rain and we went back to the trucks that we drove over in. We sat in the trucks for about a half an hour waiting for the rain to stop, but it just kept on raining. The person that I was in the truck with asked me if I was hungry and wanted to go get some breakfast, I said, "Sure, let's go." When we returned it was still raining and everyone was still sitting in the trucks. It kept raining all day and we did not do anything at all that day and got paid for it. And people wonder why taxes are so high!

The other position I worked in was the Sanitation department. This was the job that my friends had. This was the dirtiest, smelliest job that I have ever had. Just about the only good thing about this particular job was that when the route you were on for the day was done, you could leave.

For the four months that I held this job, I would have to report to work at six in the morning. The first thing that we would do was to sign in and sign out on the time sheet. Then we would stand around and wait to be assigned to a route. If we were lucky we would get an easy route like the Tower Hill section of Lawrence.

After being told which route we were on, there were always at least two people plus a driver assigned to each route. The driver would go to the beginning of the route while the two people that collected the trash would meet him there by going to the route in their own car. The reason for this was that when the day was done, the driver would have to go to the dump and the guys did not want to do this, due to the fact that their day was done, so they could just go home.

While this was very dirty and smelly work, there were some days that I had a lot of fun on the job. One day that I remember particularly well is the day that my cousin, who also worked and still does work for the city, and I were assigned to pick up trash in the alleys off of Broadway street. It was just another day on the job: hot, very smelly, and basically boring, until we reached the last alley on the route. The way that we did the alleys was one guy would work his way down one side of the alley while the other worked the other side. So my cousin and I were working our way down, and about halfway down the alley, I reached a pile of trash that had a

large cardboard box in it. When I tried to throw the box in the truck I found that it was very heavy. I asked Greg to give me a hand with it and together we managed to get it in the truck. My cousin then sent the blade around to get the trash into the truck. All of a sudden we heard someone screaming from inside the truck. I stopped the blade and reversed it. When we could see inside the truck we saw that there was a person in there. He climbed out and started to yell at us. It seems that we had thrown away his home. My cousin and I just looked at each other and began to laugh so hard that we could not work for at least ten minutes after that.

One day I remember as being very bad was the first day that I returned to work after taking a week off. The day went fine, except for the fact that I was very tired and could not keep up with the pace. We took a break and I went to a store along the route. I was extremely thirsty. I bought some orange juice and drank it down almost as soon as I had it in my hands. As soon as I got in back of the truck and smelled the odor coming out of the truck I began to throw up. This was the only time that I had ever gotten sick from the smell coming out of the truck, and I had been on the job for three months. Needless to say, I never, ever drank orange juice in the middle of any route again.

The worst day I ever had on the job, however, was a day that we got assigned to the longest and heaviest route in the city. I should have known it was going to be a bad day because as soon as I got to work, I locked my keys in my car and had to break a window to get back into the car. On this particular day there were three of us assigned to collect the trash. We jumped into one guy's car and went to the route As soon as we got out of the car at the beginning of the route it started to rain. By the time we had completed the first five stops of the day, we were all soaked to the bone and really pissed off at the driver because he was nice and dry in the cab of the truck. It took until two-thirty in the afternoon for us to complete our route that day and the rain did not stop. By the time we were finished, we could barely walk because our clothes were so wet and heavy.

About a month later, I was called into the boss's office and told that I would be laid off at the end of the week. I was not disappointed at all as I was thinking of quitting the job anyway. When I told this to the boss, he said that he thought I would not have lasted a week on the job, and he respected me for sticking with it and getting the job done. He also said that he was sorry to see me go, and that if it was up to him, I would have gotten a raise instead of being laid off.

In order to work as a sanitation engineer (trash man), a person must be able to work hard, fast, and be able to stand some very bad odors. The one thing that I learned from this job is that I can really work hard given the right motivation.

My First Job
by Nady Polanco

Working at TJ Maxx is an exciting job. I believe you have to be an out-going, talkative person to deal with all the customers. They are constantly stopping you, for example, while you are running to your register, and asking you "Where would I find something that goes with this?" You must tell them in what department they would find it, with a smile on your face. You must make it seem like you care, and are concerned about whatever it is that they are asking you. By the time you get to your register the head cashier is already mad at you, giving you an attitude as if it were your fault that the customer had a question. You really need a lot of passion to work at TJ Maxx!

I'm working full time. The management allows me to work around my school schedule, so on Tuesdays and Thursdays when I have no classes, I work about nine hours. In the mornings, I process the newly arrived clothes in the back room. Even though it's fun to see the new styles come in, I hate processing because it's so boring. All you do is take the clothes out of the heavy boxes and hang them. If you do that for five hours, you get bored to hell! Although you are working in the back room, you also have a register to run just in case they need a backup, but they usually don't call you unless it gets really busy.

People think that in the fitting room you just stand there waiting for the customers to come, count the merchandise and give them a tag. But NO! It's not like that at all. You have to process clothes when it's not busy. You also have to fix and straighten the accessories department. For example, you have to organize the purses by colors. That is a pain, because you always find a black purse where all the red ones are! We have to do this everyday and it seems like a wasted effort because a second after you are done, the customer will just put the black purse back into the red section.

The fitting room is my favorite place to work, and my manager knows it so she tries to put me there as much as she can. I like it because all the customers ask for your opinion, and it feels as if your opinions matter. I remember this one day when I was in the fitting room and this young, pretty girl asked me "How does this dress look on me?" It was the dress that I had been wanting for the past week, the dress I was going to get, the last one in my size. There was no way it was going to look good on her, I thought. It would only look good on me. I wanted that dress really badly!

" Well, green just doesn't go with color of your hair, and it's too loose on you. But, I don't know, it's up to you ...," I gladly said with a smile. She had better not take it, because I'm going to kill her, I was actually thinking.

"I guess you are right," the girl said.

"Sorry. Hope you find something else that you like," I sadly said. As she went back into the fitting room to change, I felt spoiled, but it also felt good. I was going to get the dress! I next day, I proudly purchased my dress, thinking of all I had

been through to make that possible.

When you are at your register, it's similar to the fitting room in the way that a lot of people ask for your opinion. It surprises you how much your opinion counts to people. Yes, the register is pretty hectic from time to time, but somebody has to take the customer's money.

Working on the floor is the hardest task of all. You are busy at all times. You have to take care of customers, take out the clothes from the fitting room, and return them to their department to be hung on the racks. You also have to do fixtures, which means create your own coordinated outfits for display, but the manager has to approve of them. She always accepts mine, saying, "They are pretty, unique and fashionable at the same time." Sometimes if she is doing a fixture and she needs an opinion, she will call me out of all the employees. She and I get along well. I believe you need to get along with your manager to get anywhere, or to be promoted. I have been there just three months, and she has already given me a raise.

Overall, working at TJ Maxx has been a challenging experience. It's not a hard or a complicated job. It has shown me how to lie with a smile on my face when customers ask about any outfit!

W orking for the MVRTA
by Richard Markee

My departure from working at Merchant's Tire in Lawrence was a Godsend. Having worked there for over four years as a mechanic, I had no chance for advancement other than moving to the management side of the business. This is a move I had resisted in the past partly because it entailed sales. Not only did this play a part in my seeking other employment but injuries that occurred on the job pretty much sealed it. The first injury that occurred was a severe strain on my back. This took two months of physical therapy to correct. The second injury was slightly more serious. While working under a car in the garage I tore the left rotator cuff located in my shoulder. This in itself was not too bad, but the orthopedic surgeon told me if I wanted to continue in the same profession it would have to be surgically repaired. Not wanting to endure the surgery or physical therapy, I choose to seek another job.

While glancing through the want-ads one day I came across an ad for a bus driver and I thought it warranted investigation. I contacted the employment office for this company and was promptly given an appointment for an interview. Due to my lack of experience in operating a bus, to say I was nervous about the interview would have been an understatement. Much to my surprise I not only survived the interview, I got hired! I was now an employee of the Merrimac Valley Regional Transit Authority.

The training started with learning the routes the buses took. Simple task you might think; at least I thought so. With approximately forty five routes from Newburyport to Lowell, it became much more involved than I had thought. I was never sure I had a route correctly memorized until I actually drove it. I vividly remember being stopped at an intersection, furiously going through the copious notes I had taken, trying to determine whether to go right or left. In the beginning, on more than one occasion, I turned the wrong way. This in itself is not a major infraction of company rules but not calling in on the bus's radio to inform the dispatcher is, however.

If I may, I'll touch a bit on some more of the company rules. As stated above, any time you go off route the dispatcher must be notified as to where you went off route and why. The reason could be there was construction causing a detour or maybe you simply weren't familiar with the route. All the drivers found not knowing the routes were required to take route training again.

Another rule was to be on time. The company gives you up to five minutes to report for your shift. If you are any later than that you get charged with a no call, no show. This simply means that you neglected to notify dispatch if you expected to be five or more minutes late. The drivers are allowed three such offenses. After the third time you are terminated and not even the union could save your job. The reason the company is so strict on this rule is since the company is federally funded, all buses must run within three minutes of their schedule.

There was another rule that the drivers didn't particularly care for. No passengers could be ejected from the bus without a road supervisor present regardless of their infraction. This entailed, after giving the passenger one verbal warning, notifying dispatch of what was occurring on the bus, pulling the bus to a safe spot off the road and waiting for a road supervisor to arrive. The one exception to this was if a passenger was threatening to harm or was harming another passenger, dispatch would notify the local police department and they were allowed to remove the passenger. Under no circumstances could a driver touch a passenger.

Along the same lines as being late at a time spot, a bus could never leave a time spot early. This rule is really self explanatory. If a bus is scheduled to leave point B at 7:45 and the bus goes by at 7:40 anyone arriving after that would miss the bus. As many take the bus to work and doctors appointments missing a bus could be disastrous.

One could wonder why anyone would aspire to work for a company with many strict rules. Well, to be honest, the job had many good points. For every passenger that boarded the bus and gave you a hard time, there were ten that helped to make your day pleasurable. For every teenager you'd have removed from the bus for foul language or smoking, there were ten others who would sit quietly or help an elderly passenger on or off the bus with their groceries.

Another reason I liked it were the hours I had. I worked from 5:00 A.M. to 1:30 P.M. I know many who wouldn't like those hours but I loved them. It took me five years to get the hours and route I wanted, but I thought it was worth it. I've always been an early riser, so starting early for me was great. Being tolerant of other people's shortcomings was definitely not a strong point of mine and something that I had to work on. This was cured in time however by my developing some patience.

The regular passengers on my bus also deserve mention. They were more than mere passengers to me. In fact I considered them friends. They would board my bus and tell me how their day had been going, how their families were, and sometimes bring me a coffee. All in all I enjoyed their company on my bus.

On one occasion while driving the 01 route from the Haverhill campus of NECC to Lawrence via the Methuen Mall I boarded two of my regular passengers, Cathy and Elizabeth. Both were elderly, and always very neatly dressed. Another thing I noticed was they always wore hats that enclosed their silver, grey hair. While Cathy was stout, Elizabeth was tall and slender. I considered them both my friends.

On this day, somewhere between the Methuen Mall and downtown Lawrence, Cathy suffered a stroke, sitting silently beside her friend Elizabeth. After everyone except Cathy and Liz had left the bus I noticed them still seated. I thought they maybe had shopping bags that they wanted a hand with. When I approached them I noticed Cathy leaning to one side and had a blank stare on her face. Looking into her eyes while speaking to her, I could see she could understand me but was unable to respond. At this, I became very concerned and immediately informed dispatch she needed medical assistance. I tried to comfort her and make her comfortable while waiting for the ambulance.

After what seemed like a very long time the EMTs finally arrived. They quickly

laid her down on their stretcher and examined her. They informed me she'd had a stroke while they continued to work on her. They then called the Advanced Life Support Ambulance. Shortly after, this team arrived and she was transferred to their ambulance. After being administered to for thirty five minutes, she died. I learned later they had been able to revive her for a brief time but too much damage had occurred during her stoke to sustain life.

Another incident involving a regular passenger involved a little girl of seven or eight. Students often take our buses to and from school as was the case with this girl, named Michelle. She appeared to be very withdrawn and shy, always sitting alone and not talking to the other kids. Often the other kids would pick on her, saying unkind things and teasing her. Eventually I was able to stop this from occurring after much cajoling and threatening. I first tried bribing them. This I would do by making special stops for them such as at a store or directly in front of their homes instead of the regular stop up the street. When this didn't work I tried separating them on the bus by not allowing them to sit together. When this too failed I was at my wit's end. I tried taking them a block or so from where they wanted to get off in hopes that this would make them think twice about teasing her. What finally discouraged them was threatening not to board them at all. I simply wouldn't allow them on my bus. This finally worked. If they only knew I was bluffing.

After this situation was straightened out, Michelle often sat up front with me smiling and joking. I was very happy things were beginning to go well for her.

Bus drivers often personalize their buses and passengers. It is, in effect, their work area, their space, their office, so whenever an unfamiliar passenger boarded my bus I was always a little leery of them. Would they put their feet up on my seats? Would they make a mess by discarding paper and such on my floor? I always took it personally when something of this nature occurred. I would never walk into someone's office, put my feet up on their desk, and start smoking or eating. Why would anyone be inconsiderate enough to come into my work area and do these things? I guess it takes all kinds.

After about six years at the bus company I learned I had a liver disease. This fact didn't bother me too much but the treatment for it did. The doctor informed me the only treatment available was interferon and that I'd have to stop work while the treatments were given. The first time I was allowed to take a medical leave for two months. When the doctor informed me I'd have to endure a second round of treatments I felt devastated. I did however convince him to let me continue working.

Interferon has many side effects. Not everyone is affected the same way. My own were somewhat varied. Depression, fatigue, and headaches for me were quite common. Infrequently I had periods of disorganization. On one of these occasions I was involved in a minor accident. There wasn't any damage to the bus and only minimal damage to the vehicle I hit. This did, however, prompt my doctor to stop me from working for the duration of my treatments and until the more serious side effects subsided.

Up until this time the company had been very understanding. Now however,

they informed me that another medical leave of absence would not be granted. I really loved this job so I pleaded with them. I mentioned the several driving awards I had been given, the several attendance awards I had been given, but all to no avail. Officially I was terminated because I was no longer able to physically do my job. I was heartbroken, but it all turned out for the best. If I hadn't lost my job, I would never have returned to school. I also benefited in other ways from that job. It helped me gain the ability to deal with all different kinds of people. It also gave me the very important quality of being able to laugh at my own mistakes. This I owe to my friends, the passengers.

The Cafe
by Holly Lord-Paquin

Somewhat hidden in the city of Haverhill is a small cafeteria style cafe, utilized by many patrons in the area.

It's 11 AM on a Friday morning. The weather is gorgeous and the sidewalks are servicing a great number of people who are window shopping and running errands, or even just out for a walk with a friend.

As I enter the cafe, I join the short line of people to order my late breakfast. The four cooks, who are also owners, are visible from anywhere you are in the cafe. Each person in line takes a tray and gathers their silverware as a cook asks what arrangement of food each desires. Each step you take to the left brings you closer to the cashier. All the while your tray is sliding down with you on the aluminum pipe rails that line the counter.

I can see all the orders being prepared, for the kitchen is open. The grill is hot and steaming. The tonic cooler is full and I can see that they use 2% milk, for it's stored in the cooler also. I can feel the heat from the heating lamps as I pass by. They keep the variety of meats -- turkey, lamb, pork, rare beef -- warm, which are sliced as needed. I can hear the microwave beep, telling the cook that the blueberry muffin he placed in there to warm is finished, and the clanking of a spatula on the heavy metal grill as my eggs are being scrambled dry, per my orders.

The line moves fast and my order is now being rung up on the antique register. I pay for my meal, though it is not finished, and take my coffee to a table in the far corner. Before I finish fixing my coffee, my meal is delivered personally, as always, by the cook himself. He smiles and says, "I hope the rest of your day is wonderful," and he heads to the table next to mine and starts to clear the empty used plates. I notice each time the doors are used they squeak as they swing back and forth, like an old western saloon entrance. I can't see behind the doors, but the familiar sounds of a sprayer and dishwasher arise every few minutes. I know the water in use is very hot, because of the steam that rises to the ceiling. The wall that separates this area from the dining area isn't as tall as the ceiling.

An owner sits at a table with a large board writing the days luncheon specials in green marker.

Soft rock music fills the air; it's my favorite type of music, but I can't remember the name of the song or the singer.

A woman gets up from her seat and gathers her shopping bags. As she starts for the door, the cook who was seated gets up to hold the door for her departure.

I notice a woman a few tables from me; she's smiling affectionately at her husband, who is sitting across from her, pouring large amounts of sugar in his coffee. You can see the love they have for each other and I smile because it reminds me of my own life.

A father and his two children enter the cafe; he looks exhausted as he carries

his infant daughter to a table, then chases his son of three by my table trying to pry what he wants for lunch out of him, but he only shows interest in the candy machine. I can tell it's not his first time in here; either that or he has a good set of eyes.

A single elderly man who has been reading the newspaper over a cup of coffee for quite sometime, folds it up as it came and places it at his side. Suddenly he notices a female acquaintance and waves, happy to see her. She joins him for coffee and conversation.

The cooks watched me curiously, as I sat looking around and taking notes. I think I made them nervous. They didn't ask and I didn't offer any information. They will probably watch the papers for the next few days wondering, but that's OK.

With all the noises and activity going on it's amazing how relaxed the atmosphere is here. So many people seem to know each other and no one is in a rush. The food was fabulous, but that's not the only reason people enjoy coming here; they come because they are known; they come to talk and laugh. They come to enjoy each other.

In Search of The Cure

by Mahboud S. Kavoosi

As I drive down I-93 Southbound, I come closer to the city of Boston. In the heart of this city stands a magnificent building which captures my attention. This huge architectural masterpiece is Massachusetts General Hospital, a hospital that is well known by the research community throughout the world.

Melahat is the person I am looking for, and she works on the sixth floor of one of the separate lab buildings. After going through the tough security I am able to find her, sit down, and ask her all about this world of research.

At first I direct my questions towards herself. Even though Melahat is my sister and I know pretty much everything about her, I still want to know more about her professional life. I am trying to look at her from a different angle which I have not considered before.

I start by asking her about her educational background. She says that she has studied for five years and is still studying to get her Master's. It's part of being in this field; you have to keep informed about the latest findings, attend meetings and conferences and read the many other research journals.

My second question is about the animals that they do the research on. What kind of animals are they, where are they being kept, and which are her favorites?

What I learn is that there are sheep, dogs, guinea pigs, rats and mice in the lab. The animals are being kept in a very well-maintained part of the lab which is called The Farm. Melahat explains, "As a professional, it's not right for me to get attached to these animals, but my favorite are the sheep. They are such gentle animals and so easy to work with."

The Lab consists of the physiology part of the lab, which is used for large animal surgery and it's very similar to an operating room. There is an anesthesia machine, heart monitor recorders, and other medical devices. The other section of the lab is used for rodents. It has microscopes, test tubes, and a machine that counts the white blood globules.

My next inquiry is about the safety precautions. "There are many steps to take," Melahat says, "such as scrubbing up and using sterile masks, gloves, and surgical uniforms. The reason behind all of these safety precautions is that some of the animals are highly contagious and violent, like the African monkey. On the other hand, we do not want to contaminate the animals by bringing bacteria from outside or from ourselves into the lab."

I have to ask her about the controversy surrounding the use of animals for research, the effects of this controversy on the lab workers, and how she feels about this critical issue.

From the look of her eyes. I get the feeling she does not like this particular question. She says "What they are talking about is not logical at all. I am totally against animal abuse." For example, she is against using animals for cosmetic

reasons or torturing them by keeping them under inhumane conditions.

"This is not the case in our lab," she says. "Our job is to fund a cure to save precious human lives." Melahat went on to say "Our patients are three month old infants who have AIDS, as well as eighty-year olds that have cancer."

She emphasizes "It's our job to find an answer to all of these problems facing us today. The effects of animal rights can be seen throughout the lab," Melahat continues. "To perform a simple surgery on an animal, we must got through a ton of paper work, and we must get the permission of the activist's department. They supervise all the work we do, and in some cases, it can take a long period of time. And a matter of fact, they are located right beneath us in this building and we work with them everyday."

The conversation is heating up, and so I shift to a more pleasant, neutral question. I ask her if she had seen any direct results of her research. She smiles and says "Yes, I have seen some results, but most of our research will take a long time because of the difficult and complex nature of obstacles we are dealing with."

"There is not an average day. Sometimes you have to take a knife in your hand and do a surgery, and in some cases sit in a chair and read the colleague which is connected to the libraries' computer. It takes a lot of teamwork, endless hours in the lab, and a whole lot of determination to find a so-called cure."

I gather my thoughts and try to summarize all the questions that I have. I go on asking if there is any limit to her job? Would she like to stay in this field, and where does she see herself five years from now?

She replied "There are no limits in this job. You are limited only by your knowledge, determination and your imagination and creativity. I will definitely stay in this field, try to get my Ph.D and eventually would like to run my own lab."

I wish her good luck, say good-bye, and leave her office. On the way down the stairs, I knew that I would never look at her in the same way. I am glad someone on the sixth floor of a lab in the heart of the city of Boston is doing research to come up with an answer that could save a human life. One day, I or someone I might know might be the one who desperately needs a miracle drug and I am certain that I want a person like Melahat Kavoosi in search of the cure.

The Other Side

by Yohanni E. Cuevas

It happened during a quiet, slow afternoon. I was working at the laundromat folding some clothes. The light, sunny afternoon masked the chill, and the dryers gave a soothing warmth.

As I was folding clothes, I could feel his eyes. When I realized that it was a customer, relieved, I asked, "May I help you?" He answered with an open smile, "It's my first time in a laundromat and I need help."

He was a young, good-looking Hispanic. I immediately guessed he was Dominican because of his accent and the way he waved his hands when he spoke. He was wearing pre-washed jeans and a Polo sweat shirt. His light brown eyes gave a friendliness to his face. He looked younger than his age, and the few gray hairs actually gave him a sexy look.

I'd never seen him before, so I assumed he was new to the area. Our conversation continued after I explained how he should do his laundry. We chatted about our good and bad experiences in the U.S.: how difficult it was to get used to the weather, the language, and being called "immigrants." We also talked about the things we missed from Santo Domingo: the warm weather, the happy faces of the ordinary people in the street, the families, the friends. We seemed to have so much in common. He looked really surprised at how neatly I was folding order #2567; finally he asked,"How long have you been working here?"

I explained that I had worked at Wash-n-Time for two years and that I got the job six months after I came to the U.S.. He told me that he had been here for seven months, and that his purpose was to make enough money to buy a house in Santo Domingo.

"In five more months I'll have more than enough to buy a house and start my own business."

"What! Do you gamble or something? How did you make that kind of money in such a short time?" I asked curiously.

His face turned red, he laughed and said, "Well, so far I have already shipped a car. It's a Honda '93, just waiting for me to return."

" Wow!" I exclaimed, "Do you work Asbestos or something like that?" I asked.

"No," he responded.

"But then, how have you made all that money if I don't even own a Buick '79 yet?" He looked down. His face didn't turn red this time but white, so very white, I thought. I was embarrassed; so was he. I waited for an answer. Then he looked up. He looked at me directly, and without him saying a word, I understood that he was doing drugs. The young looking guy with the flirtatious smile transformed into a monster of society. He represents that which destroys everything good in our society.

After an awkward pause, he started in on a confession I would never forget. "Every night when I leave home to "work," I ask my father for his blessing, and pray

to God for his forgiveness, because I don't know if I'm going to be back." His voice cracked and he continued, "I had a decent job and lived with my mother and my two sisters in Santo Domingo, but Ms. Good Luck gave me her back and everything went down hill."

"What do you mean?" I interrupted him.

"My mother has diabetes, and I couldn't afford the treatment. My sisters' school tuition was too expensive, and we hadn't paid the mortgage on our house for three months. I have been the breadwinner in my family since our father left."

"That must have been really terrible. I'm starting to realize that I have no problems at all," I added. Even though I was against what he was doing for work, I couldn't help but sympathize with his pain, and for one moment I saw his frustrations. God only knows what I would do in his situation, for no one can judge somebody else's actions.

After a long pause he continued on. "One of my cousins who looks just like me lent me his passport and green card for my promise of five thousand dollars. That way I could come to this country legally. Thankfully, I didn't get caught at the airport. I've been living with my father. He thinks I go to work, but I don't since I'm illegal. If I tried to get a job without a green card, I might get caught."

I took a deep breath and asked, "Is it worth it?"

He shrugged his shoulders and said, "My father has been living here for four years. Now he can afford a place to live; before he rented a small bedroom at a friend's house. My mother has good doctors and treatments and my sisters still go to school."

"But how about you?" I asked.

"Me? I'm taking one moment at a time. I'm trying to survive this. In five more months I'll be able to leave the country with enough money to do whatever I want, or I might get caught by the police. Meanwhile, I feel like nothing. My soul has been bought by ambition. This is not me. I'm afraid to look at a mirror because I know that I won't like what I see. I know it's not right, but I have no choice. I crossed the line of morality and I'll accept whatever comes."

Then without warning he said, "Clothes are done. I've got to go."

He left me with a lot of unsettled questions. He was different. He didn't fit what most people define as the stereotype of the drug-dealer. He had no jewelry, not even a watch. He wasn't wearing black clothes; his hair was short, no braids, no curls. A normal person behind a monster. However, our conversation had been peppered by the beep noises of his pager. I had always seen drug-dealers as greedy and ambitious people who would do anything to get money and power. But now I know that some of them do what they do because they care for their loved ones, and the only way to support them is by selling drugs. He showed me the other side. The one that can be seen through the eyes of understanding. I know that dealing with drugs is a way of living that leads to waste in any direction. But he had taken off his mask to let me see his soul, how bad he felt about himself and his job, so bad that he had chosen to confess to a stranger what he had done for his loved ones and also for himself.

Minutes later, I half consciously asked one of my customers, "What would you do for your loved ones?"

She looked at me strangely, "What do you mean?"

How To Catch The Big One

by William Warren

I have learned through my many years of fishing that there are many steps you must learn to take before you can catch a big bass. You make sure you have the necessary items: a good rod and reel, and many different types of bait, such as rubber worms, minnows, and a few lures. Do not forget your tackle box. You might need to have extra hooks in case you lose some. The time of year you go fishing is also a key factor in what type of clothes to wear. You would not want to be underdressed on a cold windy day. No matter how many fish you caught, you would have a miserable time. Also depending on how long you're going to be there, you might want to bring along a snack or drink.

Well, now you have your bait and you're ready to find a nice, quiet and calm place or lake, where if you were a fish you would want to be. A good fisherman always knows where to fish. If it's very hot out you should fish in the shady and deep waters. That's where the fish will be. If it's cool out, you find them more near the top of the water around twenty feet out, where the sun is keeping them warm. Once you pick your spot, get ready for an enjoyable day.

Now you need to decide which bait to start with. My personal favorite is the minnow. Reach your hand into the bucket that has the live minnows in it and pull one out. Then slide the hook under its chin and up to and out its nose. This enables the minnow to stay alive and swim while it is on the hook. It also will attract any fish in the area and bring them towards the bait. Depending on whether the minnow looks appealing or not, the fish may bite. If you're not getting any nibbles then reel it in and cast it again. To cast, all you need to do is hold the little button on top of reel down and then with a forward motion snap your wrist while holding on to the rod and let go of the button. If after approximately forty-five minutes of trying this you're still not getting any nibbles, then you need to change bait. Don't be discouraged. Fishing takes time.

Next, I would try the rubber worm. The way I would hook the rubber worm is to start at the top and put it right through to the middle. You might need a little weight to get a decent cast. Then let it sit there and every few minutes reel the rubber worm in just a few feet then let it sit again. I would say you need to stay with the rubber worm even longer than the minnow because the minnow makes motion and this attracts the fish. The rubber worm just sits until it's seen.

Do not get discouraged. I got discouraged once and just as I was getting ready to reel in the worm I got a bite, so I left it out there for a few more minutes and finally the fish took it. All the waiting was worth it when I reeled in this four-and-one-half-pound, twenty-inch, bigmouth bass.

Now you need to realize that there is a technique to catching a fish and that you don't yank the rod as soon as you feel you have got a nibble. While you're waiting for a fish to take the bait it gives you a chance to enjoy nature and listen to the birds

chirp, but you're still keeping a watchful eye on the rod. You need to hold off and wait until you see the fish has taken the bait and then you give a little tug in the opposite direction. This will set the hook, then the fish will be all yours.

You have to realize that half the fun of fishing is being outdoors just relaxing and enjoying nature. Even if you don't catch anything, you should have had a good day and have nothing to be ashamed of. There's always another day.

How To Be The Best Single Mother You Can Be

by Zoila M. Gomez

Being single and having a child is never an easy journey to follow, but if you're strong and take responsibility for your child, you will be fine.

I'm a single mother. I've been single since I was pregnant. The first thing I learned was not to be afraid of being alone. I always felt that that little thing I was carrying inside of me was always by my side.

Let's go step by step. When your child is first born, you have to think of it as a learning process for both yourself and your child. You might think that he or she is too young to learn anything but it doesn't work that way. For the first few days, you have to teach the baby how to sleep at night and be awake during the day so he is tired and sleeps through the night. Another thing you should try not to do is feed him in the middle of the night, because he could get used to that and would wake up in the night just to eat.

As a single mother you have to remember that there is no one there to help you with your child, so you have to do anything you can to get some time for yourself. Get your baby used to lying in the crib, playpen, or in a bouncing chair while you are busy. If he does not like to be alone, have him near you at all times. As he grows, he would grow to be independent, and that would help you give him some personality of his own.

Never forget to find the time to play with your baby. No matter how big or small he is, he needs you. He needs to know that you are there for him at all times. If he doesn't behave well, you have to learn to punish your child without hurting him physically or emotionally. Think of anything you didn't like about the way your parents raised you and avoid doing such things to your child. For example, I hated when my mother used to hit me for just about anything I did and never gave me the opportunity to talk about anything. Never lose your temper -- your child should not have to take responsibility for any problem that you may have had outside your home.

Avoid yelling at your child. Teach him to listen to you or to anybody by talking to him a lot. Eventually, as he grows he will be a much better person for it. I've always said that your children are what you make them be. The more time you spend with your child, the better, but for some of us that is hard work!

Make sure you pick a good babysitter when you work outside the home, someone who would be positive for your child's education and personal manners. Don't leave your kids with just anybody -- if you do, you'll probably just think about the moment you left the child, and you won't think about what might happen to a child in one moment that could affect a child for the rest of his life.

Never ever leave your child alone. In the car, in the house, in the back yard -- the place you think is the safest could mean losing your child. It's important, however, not to be paranoid ; give your child some kind of freedom.

As a single parent, you always want to teach your child to respect other people. Always keep the memory of his father alive even if the father doesn't take care of him or contribute to his upbringing. You don't want him to grow up with resentment.

Love your child as much as you can and let you know how much you love him, but try not to spoil him. Let him know that life is not easy and teach your child to be understanding about the things you can buy for him and things you can't. As a single mother, I am sure you have to keep your budget tight. You can't be spending money on junk that you should not be spending it on. Having a child, you never know when he might get sick and you would have to come up with some money to buy medicine.

As a single mother, you have to be creative. I remember that as a baby, my son Christopher never ate much or took a fair amount of formula. It used to aggravate me, but I was always looking for things to put in his formula so that he would like it better. One day I prepared his milk with fruit dessert baby food and he took the whole thing. I felt happy because I knew I had found the taste he really liked for his food.

I try to be the best mother I can be. I am very good to my baby. I teach him how to behave and how to be good to others. I hope that he grows up to be the best he can be and I hope I can help him on his way to the top.

Are We Moving, Again?

by Liliana Zagaria

Moving can be one of the most odious tasks for most individuals, including myself. But after being married for twenty years and moving ten times, I can say I got a little bit of practice. We have moved four times in my country, twice to a foreign country and five times in the United States.

If someone asks me for some tips about moving I would say that first, all members of the household should clean up their own rooms. Everything that you haven't worn or used for more than two years, should be donated to charity. I usually donate clothes to The Women's Resource Center, and I give furniture and appliances to the Salvation Army, because they will pick up the items at your home.

Also, it is very important to do a good cleaning of your attic and basement. I am very fortunate because my husband is better than me and doesn't keep anything he anticipates not using again. The worst member in my house is my son, who wants to save everything "for his children." So if you can convince your children that someone will enjoy those baby toys more than them, you won't have a lot of trouble. If you are moving close to the holidays you can ask your children to help you wrap the old toys in nice paper and deliver them to the next shelter, so someone can have a little present for the holidays.

As soon as you do the clean up, it is time to start packing. I don't recommend doing this until your house is sold. The house should look impeccable when it is on the market, and not have boxes all over. I was very fortunate each time I moved, because a moving company did all the packing. We carried with us only our most special items, in the car or the plane depending where we were going, and we carefully wrapped them in towels.

You have to do all the wrapping and I suggest to start saving newspapers a couple of months ahead, and going to your local supermarket and ask for big boxes. Sometimes I found great boxes at work. Usually the ones that the computer paper comes in are very thick and resistant. Or if you can afford it, just buy boxes at Federal Express, UPS or at a moving company.

You should start packing first the items you don't use on a regular basis, such as the china. Also included in that category are the clothes and things from the opposite season. For example, if you are moving in the winter, you can pack all summer clothes and garden tools. The attic and the basement are good places to start because you usually keep the items there you don't regularly use.

At the time of packing, take Polaroid pictures of what goes in each box, so if you need something in a rush in your new home you will know where it is. Also, I found it very helpful to use thick markers and write in each box the room of the house that the box should be delivered. This avoids a lot of time when you unpack and the box is where it belongs.

Usually my children pack and unpack their own stuff, most of the time

because they don't want me to know what they are putting in their boxes.

After moving so many times I have to admit that we were extremely lucky with the movers we used, because we never lost boxes or had anything arrive damaged. I recalled only once the television screen was broken, but the insurance company reimbursed us for the cost of a new one. The other things that were damaged were insignificant compared with the volume and all the times and distances we had moved.

Don't leave all the cleaning for the last minute, and remember you can not leave anything in the house. I usually clean the oven, refrigerator and freezer in depth about a month before. Try to avoid the use of the oven after you clean it. Most of the time I have moved in the summer, so we do a lot of cookouts during the month prior to the move. If you have wall-to-wall carpet, cover the traffic areas with runners, plastic, or old sheets. You don't want the movers to ruin your carpet, especially if it is raining or snowing at the time of moving.

When everything is out of the house, I clean with Pinesol, even inside the cabinets. For the carpets, I use a deodorizer powder. It is a nice feeling when you walk into your new home and it smells good.

As soon as I am established in the new home, I invite the closest neighbors for coffee and cake. This will give us the opportunity to know them a little better and talk in a more relaxing situation than when you meet someone outside doing the yardwork in the Summer.

Also, I make small cards with information that I need. For example: pediatrician, dentist, orthodontics, primary care physician, gynecologist, best supermarket, best mall, etc. I give one to each neighbor and ask them to fill it up for me. Usually I get very good referrals with this system. When someone new moves to my neighborhood, I put that information in a card for them.

Other important information that I usually get from the realtor includes a map of the town I will be moving, the location of the house, schools, town, library, post office, supermarket, and YMCA, etc. This way I will avoid getting lost the first few weeks in the new town.

It is never easy to move, especially when you leave behind good friends and a town where you feel comfortable, but at least with a positive attitude, open mind and good organization, your moving experience could be a pleasant one.

Racism

by Joleen Acevedo

I believe that people need to be more educated; educated about the fact that, no matter what color, race, or ethnic background you come from, we're all human beings. We all eat, sleep, and breath the same. We all feel and we all have a heart. I believe that as a result of a lack of education, comes ignorance like never before.

I can remember being sent away to boarding school when I was about fourteen years old. The school was in Hamburg, Pennsylvania. I remember our arrival there. The director of the school gave my parents and me the tour of the place. Everything seemed to look fine. After my parents left, I settled myself into my dorm room. It began to get late, so I decided to skip dinner in the cafe and go to sleep. Besides, I was a little nervous about being in a new school. I figured I'd feel better in the morning.

I awoke the next morning to find myself knee deep in water. My room had been flooded. I didn't know what had happened, or even why. I was so upset. My things, that's all I could think about. How could someone do this to me? I tried so hard to think of this as just a silly prank someone played, like breaking in the new kid in school. But I realized it couldn't be that. When I opened my dorm room door, I found in black marker, "Leave Zebra Leave!" Then someone from down the hall yelled, "Go home to your n*gger-loving mother!"

"Oh God!" I thought to myself. At this point, I wanted to die. I couldn't believe this. I ran back into my room. I put some clothes on, then peeked out the door to see if anyone was there.

I left to find the director who had given me the tour of the school. I wanted to talk with him about this problem. Finally, I found him. He brought me to his office. His exact words were, "Now explain."

I told him what happened, then he said, "Go and tell the Dean of your dorm." I couldn't believe this.

I said to the director, "Can't you do something? You're the director of the school."

"No. You have to tell your dean," he said. I left his office. On my way out, I can remember getting many dirty looks from other students outside the office.

I arrived back to the dorm. I went straight to the dean's office. The director had called to inform her that I was coming. I knew this, just by the way she acted.

The dean was very upset. She said to me, "Don't ever go over my head to anyone else, ever again. If you have a problem with my dorm, you tell me." I tried to explain, but she would not listen. I left.

I spotted a pay phone at the end of the hallway. I called my parents. My mother was the first I spoke with. I cried, "Please come and get me. I hate it here!" I told her of the cruel things that were said. She asked me to stick it out a little longer.

She said, "Not everyone there will be like that. Just give it time." I told my mother I would try, but I didn't know how long I would last. I said my good-byes to my mother.

I started back to my dorm. When I got there my room door was open. There were three black girls. They pulled me into my room.

They began saying the most cruel things I had ever heard. Most of all, I didn't expect this from them. One of the girls said to me, "Tell your white-trash mother to stick to her own kind." The others just called me cruel things like "zebra" and "wanna-be black girl." One girl even said, "You don't even know what you are, do you?"

At this point, I was in tears. All this because my mother is white and my father is black. How can people be so cruel? Why? We are all human beings. How can they judge me because my parents have different skin color? They're both human. What makes my parents any different from theirs? Their mother gave birth to them, as my mother did me. Their father is probably as wonderful as my father is. As a result, I felt so hurt and confused it seemed as if I was dying inside.

People should never be judged by their color, race, or ethnic background. It's not what's on the outside that counts. It's what's on the inside. My parents always said, never judge a book by its cover.

I tolerated this cruel treatment. I eventually went home, although this made me realize how cruel people can be. In going through this terrible time in my life, I have come to the realization that education must start at home. Parents should teach their children at home that discrimination is not right. If this were taught at home, and teachers set good examples at school, I think people would not be as cruel.

I know that we may not be able to stop all degrading racism, but I think home and school education is a good start. As a parent now of four children, all under the age of nine, I can honestly say that what we put in our children's minds when they are young stays with them. This is why education starts at home. We are their first teachers.

I hope somehow in the future there will be a time when neither color, nor race, nor ethnic background will be an issue, a time when people can see past all these things, when all people are equal.

Drugs
by M. P.

What is addiction? Addiction is a term with means to be "hooked" on something. The dictionary definition states that addiction is a "compulsive need for and use of a habit forming substance such as heroin, nicotine or alcohol." Drugs are no good for people because they are addictive.

I chose this topic because I have had a lot of personal experience in this field. I know for a fact that drugs are addictive because I used to deal them. I sold cocaine and crack cocaine for about a year before I was arrested for it. Throughout that year, I saw what drugs do to people. I've seen people cry for the substance when they didn't have the money to purchase it. I've seen certain women offers sexual favors for one lousy ten dollar rock of cocaine. I have seen certain individuals rob others to be able to buy their drugs.

One day I was hanging out where I used to sell drugs. A lady who was a customer was walking up the street to purchase some drugs. As she was walking up, an individual passed her on a bike. Now I could see this from where I was standing. The individual got off the bike and went up to the lady. The next thing I knew was that the lady was screaming that she had been robbed and stabbed for her money. The individual on the bike rode up and purchased rocks with the lady's money. Then he left. The lady proceeded to walk up towards us holding her stomach, and screaming that she had been stabbed and robbed. When she reached us she had tears coming down her eyes, and the only thing she said to us was "That f*cking bastard took my money. The money I was going to use to buy my rocks with."

Wouldn't you think after being stabbed you would be worried about your wound, and not the money for your drugs? This particular individual kept asking for one of us to give her a freebie. She kept insisting she needed it to take her pain away. I responded to the lady by saying, "Why don't you go to the hospital and stop thinking about drugs for once in your life?" She began crying even more hysterically. She said "I'll go to the hospital after I get high."

At that point I told her to dismiss herself from my sight before she got hurt again. I wouldn't have done anything to her, because I would never raise my hand to a female. It was just that this lady made me so sick, because she was standing in front of me crying for a rock when she had just been stabbed. To me, this lady was addicted and she didn't want to realize it.

Another example of what I have seen is one day a lady had come with her husband to buy drugs. The couple didn't have any money to purchase them, and asked for a freebie. When we denied them, the woman, in front of her husband, offered us sexual favors. One of my friends took her up on her offer and brought her in back of the house. The lady proceeded to perform the sexual favor she had offered, while her husband was waiting for her out front. With this example that

I've just given you, you should believe what I'm telling you about addiction. I believe if the man wasn't also addicted he would never have let his wife do what she was doing. She was doing this for both of them to smoke the crack she had earned.

There are people who would argue with me on this subject, and say drugs aren't addictive. I believe people who would argue this are those people who are addicted to drugs. Drugs are not only in Haverhill --- they're everywhere. You read in papers and see on the news almost every night about drug raids and crimes. Drugs kill, such as you see a lot of crime in Boston and in Lawrence. Most of these crimes are committed because of deals going bad, and also a lot of crimes happen because the junkies need to get their money from somewhere to buy their drugs. So, they steal and even kill.

I was once addicted to a drug. The drug wasn't to the extreme such as crack or cocaine. I was addicted to marijuana. I had smoked marijuana for seven years straight, I know I was addicted because when I didn't have it I would get mood swings. I would catch an attitude with everyone around me. I'm no longer addicted to it, thanks to the judge in my court case. I haven't smoked marijuana in about three months since court has been over. The reason I quit was because I get urine tests done every month. If it wasn't for that I believe I would still be smoking. So I give all my gratitude to the judge even though it was a bad way to stop.

This was the way I stopped, but not everybody will have this chance to stop as easily as I did.

There are other ways to fight drug addiction. One way to avoid drug addiction is to start educating children in the earlier stages, such as in elementary school about drugs. Have speakers come in and speak to the children about the effects of drugs. For the adults I believe the solution is in drug counseling and detox. I believe drug addicts need to be able to help themselves also. They can't always expect for others to always be there to help them if they don't want to help themselves.

Welfare Reform

by Tammy Salazar

Recently, the welfare reform was written about almost every day in the newspaper. When it was finally signed and agreed on, I felt some relief. I believe the government has a lot to do with so many single parents becoming dependent on welfare. Some of the things they are talking about are harsh, but I believe some of us need that push. After a while you get into a rut and don't know where to go.

I have been on and off welfare for the past eleven years. I am not proud of this but it is the truth. I have had jobs but never could stay long at one. The reason was that the pay was too low to support my children or to manage my bills. Without any education it is hard to find a good paying job. It has never been easy waiting for that small check and being broke the same day.

In the middle of last year, when the governor started talking about welfare reform, I was scared. What I did was run out and start looking for work. The welfare office set me up with a program to make the search easier. I did find a job, but the hourly pay was only $6.00. The job was in Wilmington and I had to borrow money to buy a used car. My children were put into day care once again. Two of my children got suspended on two separate occasions, so I had to take time off from work, without pay. I ended up quitting my job. Within a short time my car was needing repairs. I just couldn't afford the car anymore, so I sold it. Once again I was on welfare but I decided not for long this time; I would go back to school.

There are plenty of people who are screwing the system. It is unfair to the ones who are honest and struggle to make ends meet. I was told years ago that the welfare caseworker would visit the homes of their clients, to see if any adults were in the house that were not supposed to be. That would be a good idea to stop some of the fraud that is going on. There are about 70% who have a live-in boyfriend and the client does not report it. The reason this would be fraud is because the rules on welfare are strict. The recipient must report any changes in income, and/or if any one else is living in the house.

The single mothers who are honest with their social worker, they don't even have enough money to buy a car, let alone pay insurance for one. So what else is left to do -- the bus or taxi cost money and that can really add up, so you walk. If you are like me and one of the children gets sick, you are put more in the hole. Especially if you have to pick them up from their school and it is in another city. I wasn't brought up to be on welfare and I don't want my children on it.

My childrens' fathers do not pay child support. One lives out of state and is remarried, with two more children. The other one has not worked in years due to his alcoholism. I have always given welfare the information needed to locate them but one is an illegal alien and has made it through a legal loophole; the other one has no permanent residence or employment. Therefore, it is very difficult to locate them and to have them pay any support.

The welfare reform is designed to get able-bodied AFDC parents into the work force, which is quite fair I believe. Welfare does help with the day care for the parents who need it, by giving vouchers that require you to pay only a few dollars. People are worried once their benefits are stopped that they will lose day care, food stamps, and Mass Health. So if the governor gave incentives, such as not losing everything all at once, that would be supportive. But the truth is, welfare has been giving some parents day care one year after their case closed and the same with Mass Health. With food stamps you could receive them indefinitely depending on family size and your monthly income. The family cap rule on no increase of benefits if you have another child is understandable. There are women who keep having babies and the welfare amount continues getting higher, which is ridiculous. A teenage parent under the age of twenty will be required to live with a relative or a responsible adult. For some, it may mean going into a foster home and continuing with their education. This might stop some of these young moms from coming to think that welfare is a way of life. I believe if I had this opportunity to live with a relative, things may have turned out differently. I did go back to school at the age of nineteen, with two children, and got my GED.

I think the first thing they should come down strictly on is making the fathers pay child support, or if they have no job, to perform community service.

There are more aspects to this reform that are worthwhile, but I only wrote about a few. For sure a two year limit on the roles sounds quite fair. If you are caring for a disabled child or you are disabled, you may be exempt from the welfare reform. I have a disabled child, but I really don't care to be exempt. My goal is to be able to finish college and if possible get a part time job while attending school. So when my two years expire, I can go to work and be off welfare for good.

When my child needs a new pair of sneakers, I want to be able to say, "Honey, which ones do you want?" Giving the welfare recipients incentives to want to work may be helpful and also having workshops on the benefits you get out of working, the need and the rewards of being self-reliant and financially stable.

Contributor's Notes

Joleen Acevedo is a 25 year-old Haverhill resident enrolled in the LPN program at Northern Essex. A student in Barbara Stachniewicz's Basic Writing class, she is married and has four children. Her interests include singing and working out. She says that before BW, she "liked to write, but felt she couldn't express herself well enough. Now I feel confident."

Jose Alers, 32, is a Machine Operator, auxiliary Police officer, and Liberal Arts major who hopes to one day work in the medical field. Enrolled in Carol Barron's BW class in Fall '94, Jose once "hated writing" but now feels confident in his abilities. In his limited free time, he enjoys woodworking and building models. He lives in Lawrence with his four children.

Jaime Alvarez, 23, is a General Studies major from Lawrence. A student of Joanna Fortna's in Fall '94, Jaime once considered writing "a waste of time." By the end of BW, however, he had discovered it was "a needed factor in college and in life" and says "This was an experience I will never forget." In his free time, he enjoys reading and aspires to be a Teen Counselor.

Deborah Barrett, 26, is the official Writing Center mascot! A student in Barbara Stachniewicz's Fall '94 section of BW, Deb devoted much time and energy to her writing and gifted the staff of the Writing Center daily with her effusive storytelling. A Business Management major, Deb hopes to pursue a career in the Hospitality industry. When she's not chasing after her toddler son, Hunter, she enjoys photography. She lives in Haverhill.

Bob Buck is a 26 year-old Computer Technology major who aspires to be a Network Administrator. In his free time, Bob enjoys baking, comic book collecting, and is a voracious sci-fi reader. A student of Barbara Stachniewicz in Spring '95, Bob says that before BW, he "hated writing." "Now," he concedes with a smile, "it's not that bad ...." He lives in Andover.

Yohanni Cuevas was a student in Lyn LeGendre's BW class in Fall '94. A Business Transfer major from Lawrence, she says that she always enjoyed writing, but now she "LOVES it." She enjoys listening to music and writing poetry in Spanish. She hopes to one day teach Business courses. She is 21.

Victoria Price Dubus, 20, is a Liberal Arts major from Newburyport. Before her semester in Lyn LeGendre's BW class, Victoria says she was "scared of writing -- thought I couldn't do it." Now she feels more confident and enjoys it. An au pair, Victoria hopes to work with abused children.

Kelly Flannery is a Liberal Arts major from Pepperell, MA. She was a BW student of Mike Wilcomb's in Fall '94.

Zoila Gomez is a 23 year-old Liberal Arts major. A student in Faith Benedetti's BW section in Spring '94, Zoila hopes to pursue a career in Law. She lives in Lawrence with her son, Christopher.

Mahboud Kavoosi, 23, was a student of Lyn LeGendre's in Fall '94. Originally from Tehran, Iran, Mahboud is studying Electronic Technology and hopes to work in Engineering. He writes that before BW, he "was scared of writing, and did not like it." Now he feels good about it, and enjoys the writing process. In his free time, he enjoys sports and music. He lives in Derry, NH.

Holly Lord-Paquin is a 30 year old mother of three. A Liberal Arts major who hopes to work the medical field, Holly was a student in Barbara Stachniewicz's BW class. In her spare time, she enjoys writing and quilting. She has always loved to write, but says that the BW course helped to build confidence. She lives in Haverhill.

Richard Markee, 38, of Lawrence used to think that writing was a chore. Now, he says, he "is much improved and has more admiration for people who are able to do it well." A student in Mike Wilcomb's BW class in Spring '95, he enjoys bowling, coin collecting, and spending time with his family. He is married and has one son, 6 year old Richie.

Patricia Moffatt, 48, writes that before enrolling BW in Fall '94, she "always drew a blank when it came to writing." Now, she says, " I never knew I had the ability to write and am proud of my accomplishments. She credits instructor Lyn LeGendre for her encouragement. A Lab Techician, Pat is pursuing a degree in Biotechnology. In her free time, she enjoys bowling, golf, boating and candlemaking. She lives in Haverhill with her husband and son.

Maribel Monge is a Computer Operations major from Lawrence. She was a student of Suzanne Van Wert's in Spring '94.

Suzanne Morin is a 42 year-old Medical Records major from Pelham, NH. A student in Greg Mendonca's BW section in Spring '95, Suzanne says that she had not written anything for a very long time, but now feels confident in her writing abilities. She enjoys reading, spending time with her family, and studying. She is married and has four children.

M.P. is a 20 year-old student from Haverhill. He hopes to become a social worker for children.

Nady Polanco, 17, is a Business Administration major. A student of Lyn LeGendre's in Fall '94 BW section, Nady felt uneasy about expressing herself on paper, but now feels prepared enough to handle any writing task she is assigned. In her free time, she enjoys playing volleyball. She lives in Haverhill.

Tammy Salazar is a 28 year-old Mental Health Technology major. Before enrolling in Mike Wilcomb's BW section in Spring '95, she disliked the idea of writing. She nows "really enjoys" expressing herself in this way. In addition to caring for her four sons, Tammy enjoys dancing, reading and working out. She lives in Lawrence.

Gail Sauvan, 38, is pursuing a degree in Accounting. A student of Lyn LeGendre's in Fall '94, Gail was indifferent to writing, occasionally penning letters to friends and not much else; she believes that BW helped her to communicate better. An Amesbury resident, Gail enjoys bowling, shooting pool, working crosswords and playing video games with her son, Dana.

Michael Tourville, 34, loves to tinker. An Electronic Technology major, Michael has spent much of his time fixing and putting things together; not until this Spring '95, as a student in Barbara Stachniewicz's BW class did he begin putting words together. "I never attempted writing before," he says. "Now I enjoy it. I was quite surprised that people would be interested in reading what I wrote." He lives in Auburn, NH with his wife and one child.

William Warren, a Liberal Arts major from Methuen, is pursuing a career in Physical Therapy. When he is not studying or bartending, he enjoys sports and music. Before enrolling in Barbara Stachniewicz's BW section in Spring '95, he "hated writing." He is 24.

Liliana Zagaria, 43, works as a Spanish interpreter in the Medical field. A student of Suzanne Van Wert in Fall '94, she says that taking BW greatly improved her confidence in writing. She enjoys working out, going to the theatre and dining out with her family. She lives in North Andover with her husband and children.